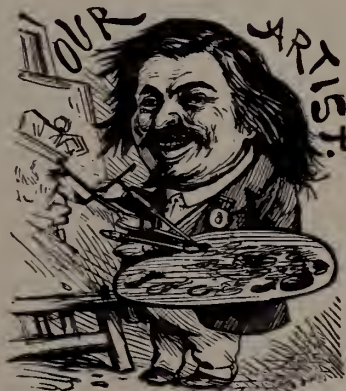


FIVE PAINTINGS FROM

Th. Nast 's

GRAND

CARICATURAMA



THE WRETCH WHO DID IT ALL.

The Swann Collection of Caricature and Cartoon

FIVE PAINTINGS FROM

Th. Nast's

G R A N D

C A R I C A T U R A M A

Introduction and Commentary

by

Lloyd Goodrich

Advisory Director, Whitney Museum of American Art

An Exhibition from The Swann Collection of Caricature and Cartoon, New York

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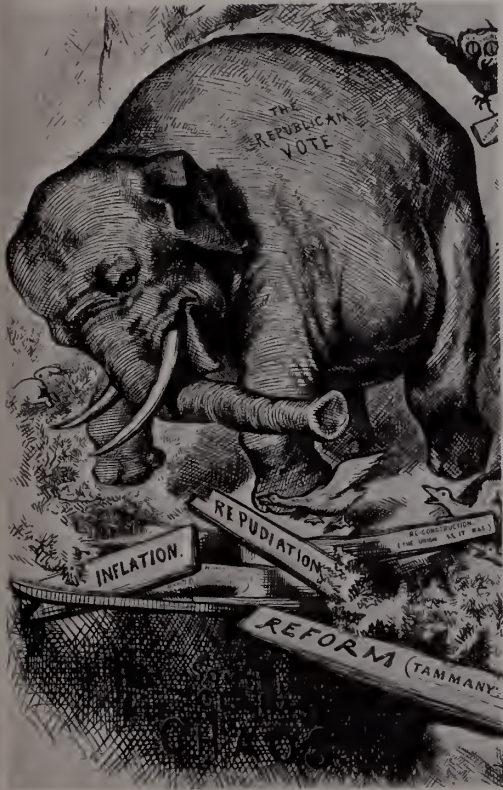
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THE REPUBLICAN ELEPHANT, THE TAMMANY TIGER, THE DEMOCRATIC DONKEY.
 Details from Thomas Nast cartoons in Harper's Weekly.



Thomas Nast was the father of American political cartooning, and the strongest cartoonist of nineteenth-century America. In the post-Civil War period, with its violent issues and open corruption, he exercised an influence unequalled by any cartoonist before or since. Absolutely fearless, uncompromising in his beliefs, he pictured men and events with mordant wit and crushing force. He had the cartoonist's essential gift, that of presenting ideas in concrete pictorial images; and he invented or first gave wide currency to many of the symbols used today, such as the Republican elephant, the Democratic donkey and the Tammany tiger. The wealth of his imagery and the massive power of his draftsmanship and design rank him among the leading American artists of his time in any field.

Nast's politics were always highly personal. Personalities and events meant more to him than abstract ideas. An idealist on the one hand and a merciless fighter on the other, he had the temperament that makes an effective crusader: he saw everything in terms of unmixed good or evil. He was strongest on the offensive; when he attacked, his wit became more biting, his blows more devastating. Almost invariably he proved to be on the winning side—which won partly because he was on it. The most famous example of this was the part he played in breaking up the Tweed Ring in 1871.

Like many of the best American graphic artists of the period, Nast was of German origin. He was born in Bavaria, in 1840. His father, a trombone-player in a regimental band, held liberal opinions that led to his family's emigration in 1846. In New York the elder Nast played in theater orchestras, and often took his son with him to carry his trombone, so that the boy grew up with a love and knowledge of the stage that were

to be important elements in his art. Precocious, and mostly self-taught, in his teens he was already a pictorial reporter, and during the Civil War, while still in his early twenties, he became the most popular Northern cartoonist, beginning a connection with *Harper's Weekly* that lasted twenty-five years.

In the war Nast was completely dedicated to the Union cause. To him the issues were simple: freedom against slavery, union against rebellion. But it was the post-war period that gave full scope to his gifts. The war did not stop with Appomattox; the struggle between North and South continued on the less bloody but no less violent battlefield of politics. The so-called Radical wing of the Republican party, motivated partly by idealistic concern for the Southern Negroes, partly by determination to establish Republican control of Southern politics, adopted increasingly severe policies toward the South: military rule, disenfranchisement or exclusion from public office of much of the white population, and universal Negro suffrage—even though only six Northern states then permitted the last. Anti-Negro legislation and sporadic violence in the South played into the Radicals' hands.

The assassination of Lincoln—the greatest tragedy, next to the war itself, for both South and North—had raised to the presidency Andrew Johnson, Southern by birth, an old-fashioned states'-rights Democrat, honest, limited and stubborn. At first his policies were a continuation of Lincoln's, more generous toward the South than the Radicals'. But he completely lacked Lincoln's political wisdom, and soon he and Congress, increasingly dominated by the Radicals, were at each other's throats. Johnson, on strictly states' rights grounds, vetoed Radical measures such as the Civil Rights

ANDREW JOHNSON'S RECONSTRUCTION AND HOW IT WORKS

Detail from a cartoon by Thomas Nast, Harper's Weekly, September 1, 1866.



GRAND CARICATURAMA CATALOGUE

December 4, 1867. Collection: The New York Public Library.

CATALOGUE.



PART I.

1. THE ARTIST'S DREAM.
Music. Air—*I dreamt I dwelt in Marble Halls*
2. COLUMBIA LANDING ON PLYMOUTH ROCK.
Music. Air—*Hail Columbia.*
3. DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.
Music. Air—*Yankee Doodle.*
4. COLUMBIA AND JONATHAN AT HOME.
Music. Air—*Oh! dear, what can the matter be.*
5. THE KANSAS ROW
Music. Air—*Jordan is a hard road to travel.*
6. STATE RIGHTS.
Music. Air—*High Daddy.*
7. HUNTING IN THE SWAMP, AND THE UNDERGROUND R. R.
Music. Air—*Rail Road Galop.*
8. JOHN BROWN.
Music. Air—*His soul is marching on*
9. KING COTTON
Music. Air—*'Way down South in Dixie.*
10. THE EVE OF WAR.
Music. Air—*Just before the battle, mother.*
11. THE UPRISING OF THE NORTH
Music. Air—*We will rally round the flag, boys.*
12. CONTRABAND OF WAR
Music. Air—*Kingdom coming.*
13. PEACE IN NEW ORLEANS.
Music. Air—*Give me some food.*
14. OUR NEUTRAL FRIENDS.
Music. Air—*The fine old English gentleman.*
15. THE OGRE OF ANDERSONVILLE.
Music. Air—*Starved in Prison.*
16. EMANCIPATION.
Music. Air—*Star Spangled Banner.*
17. ULYSSES, THE GIANT KILLER.
Music. Air—*Hail to the Chief.*

18. SHERMAN'S RUMMERS MARCHING THROUGH GEORGIA
Music. Air—*Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching*
19. THE LAST DITCH
Music. Air—*Just after the battle, mother.*
20. CAPTURE OF JEFF DAVIS
Music. Air—*A Maiden! Behold Me!!*

PART II.

21. CELEBRATION OF WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY
Music. Air—*Hunter's Song.*
22. GATES TO THE TEMPLE OF LIBERTY
Music. Air—*Who's that knocking at the Door?*
23. CORONATION OF HIS HIGHNESS
Music. Air—*Old King Cole.*
24. THE MASSACRE AT NEW ORLEANS.
Music. Air—*Oh, fatal hour*
25. PALACE OF TEARS.
Music. Air—*The long, long weary day, was passed in* [turns away]
26. SWINGING ROUND THE CIRCLE.
Music. Air—*Whoop la*
27. RECONSTRUCTION.
Music. Air—*We may be happy yet.*
28. OUR NEW POSSESSIONS
Music. Air—*North Star Quadrilles*
29. SOUR APPLE TREE.
Music. Air—*Fierce Flames—"Il Trovatore."*
30. IMPEACHMENT SCARE.
Music. Air—*Woodman, spare that tree.*
31. THE BOYS IN BLACK.
Music. Air—*Johnny has gone for a Soldier.*
32. NEXT
Music. Air—*The vacant Chair*
33. AU REVOIR
Music. Air—*Make me no gaudy Chaplet.*



Our Artist has received the "Legion of Honor" (Mortu Anas) from His Highness, at the Grand Exposition at Washington.

Bill of 1866 and the Reconstruction Acts of 1867, but Congress easily overrode all his vetoes. Johnson became the target for the most violent personal attacks that any President had suffered, culminating in 1868 in the attempt to impeach him, which failed by a single vote in the Senate.

The rights and wrongs of Johnson's policies have been debated by historians for decades, with a tendency to see him as more sinned against than sinning. But to Nast, who agreed completely with the Radicals, Johnson was the personification of all evil, and he launched against the President a series of savage pictorial attacks that grew in power and venom with each cartoon. Though his cartoon style was not yet fully developed, these anti-Johnson drawings were a preparation for the shattering blows that he was to inflict on the Tweed Ring a few years later.

Nast's cartoons have become part of the American pictorial heritage. Less known are his paintings. Early in his career he aspired to be a painter as well as a cartoonist, and in the 1860's he produced a number of paintings, which were exhibited in the National Academy and elsewhere. His subjects were usually patriotic (from the Northern viewpoint): *The Departure of the Seventh Regiment for the War, Sherman's March through Georgia, Lincoln Entering Richmond*. He evidently worked long over these oil paintings, and although labored they have a heavy power; they deserve more recognition than they have received.

A different kind of painting appeared in a series of about sixty life-size caricatures created to decorate the "Bal d'Opera" at New York's Academy of Music in April 1866. The victims were men and women prominent in public life, but on

the whole his treatment of them was humorous rather than satiric. *Harper's Weekly* reproduced eighteen of them, commenting on "this new and original style of adornment," which "formed the principal topic of conversation." A week later they were auctioned off for a good figure, and most of them found their way to Thomas's Saloon on Broadway near 23rd Street, where crowds came to see them, and husbands even brought their wives in the morning before the place filled up.

The Opera Ball paintings were single caricatures. But about a year later, encouraged by their success, Nast embarked on a much more ambitious project: a series of thirty-three big paintings, each about eight feet high by twelve wide, which he called his Grand Caricaturama. Since no illustrations by him appeared in *Harper's* for over a year, from the midsummer of 1867 to that of 1868, he was evidently busy painting the Caricaturama in the second half of 1867. Its exhibition opened in New York on December 4th, 1867, at Dodworth Hall, 806 Broadway. From New York it went to Boston, where it was shown from March 30th, 1868, in Horticultural Hall.

The New York Public Library has preserved a copy of the catalogue of "Th. Nast's Grand Caricaturama. A Series of Thirty-Three Grand Historical Paintings," and also a scrapbook of newspaper accounts, probably kept by Nast himself. From these we know that the paintings were shown as a moving panorama, on a stage, with a half-humorous explanatory lecture (given in New York by an actor, and in Boston, appropriately, by a well-known lyceum lecturer), and with musical accompaniment by a female pianist. In the catalogue, the accompanying air is given for each subject. "Declaration of Independence" was accompanied by "Yankee

THE OGRE OF ANDERSONVILLE

1867. Pencil. 8¾" x 7¾". Th. Nast's sketch book. Collection: The Pierpont Morgan Library.



Doodle," "Sherman's Bummers Marching through Georgia" by "Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching," and "Capture of Jeff. Davis" (who was falsely reputed to have tried to escape in woman's clothes) by "A maiden! Behold me!!". There were performances every evening at eight, and Saturday matinees at two. Admission was fifty cents, with twenty-five cents for children.

A sketchbook by Nast in the Pierpont Morgan Library contains his ideas for the Caricaturama, in both drawings and words, running to almost two hundred pages. These notes reveal the inventiveness and thought that went into planning the project, quite aside from the execution of it. From the first the overall plan was an historical fantasy, from "Columbia Landing on Plymouth Rock" to the contemporary political scene. Part I was devoted to the past, through the Civil War; Part II to current issues, with Andrew Johnson in the role of villain. A recurring theme in Part I was the conflict between North and South, sometimes symbolized by the Puritan and the Cavalier. Judging by his written notes, Nast thought of the Caricaturama as a sort of historical fairytale, but one involving real persons, past and present, some of them mercilessly ridiculed. The ingenuity of the entire concept and its wealth of symbols and images are evidenced by the sketchbook, the list of titles, and the newspaper accounts, which in the leisurely style of the time describe many of the scenes in detail.

The popular reception was highly favorable. "The audience was drawn from the most cultivated and fashionable classes," *The New York Citizen* reported, "and on the opening night was in the highest good humor with the artist and his admir-

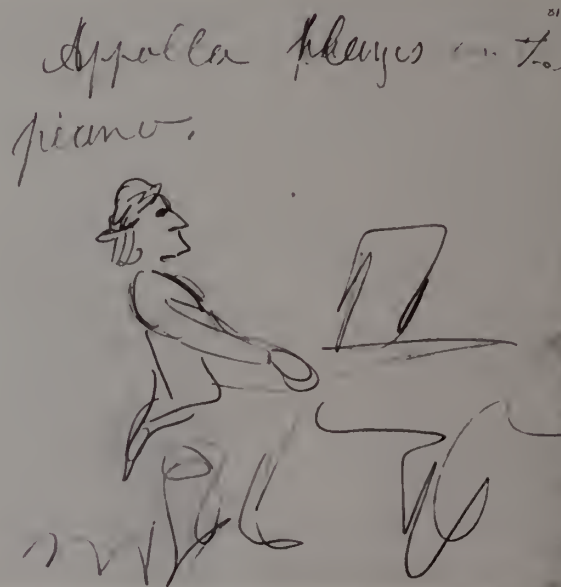
able paintings. Mr. Nast was called before the curtain at the close of the entertainment, and responded to the applause with which he was greeted by a speech as brief and appropriate as any of the orations of Gen. Grant." Almost all the reviews, in both New York and Boston, were in the same vein, speaking of the audiences' enjoyment and enthusiasm. It was generally recognized that the artistic quality of the paintings, as well as the tone of the lecture and the music, raised the Caricaturama above the level of the ordinary panorama. The only exceptions to the favorable press were some New York Democratic papers. *The World*, whose editor, Manton Marble, was among those lampooned, wrote: "Mr. Nast has chosen to pander to the meanest passions and prejudices of the most unthoughtful persons of the day," and *The Evening Express* said: "These thirty-three pictures purport to represent the history of America....In reality, they are little more nor less than a coarse and scurrilous attack upon the Executive.... Mr. Nast has prostituted art in descending to the scurrility of a third-rate stump speaker."

Just how long the performances continued in the two cities is not clear from the newspapers; they seem to have lasted about three weeks in Boston, probably longer in New York. Nast's biographer Albert Bigelow Paine wrote in 1904, two years after Nast's death: "This 'Caricaturama' was badly managed, for Nast was never a financier, and was abandoned after a brief season of New York and Boston, during which it excited considerable admiration, a share of resentment, and resulted in no profit whatever. The ambitious cartoonist was not discouraged. He put the big failure away and went back to his boxwood and pencils." But judging from the contem-

porary accounts, the "failure" was not in the public reception. Probably this ambitious venture was simply too expensive to pay for itself.

Aside from the sketchbook, catalogue, and newspaper accounts, no trace remained of the Caricaturama until recently. Then in 1950 five large paintings turned up in a barn near Morristown, New Jersey, where Nast had lived for years. In 1968 they were acquired from Theodore A. Merkt by Erwin Swann, founder of the Swann Collection of Caricature and Cartoon, a non-profit organization devoted to preserving the art of caricature and cartoon in all media. The paintings average about eight by twelve feet, and four of them are signed "Th. Nast." These are not in oil but a water-based medium, probably tempera, and on cotton. From their size and subjects, they are unquestionably part of the Caricaturama. Though no contemporary reproductions of the latter have been found, and the five paintings bear no titles, their imagery corresponds with five of the subjects listed in the early catalogue, and with the newspaper descriptions.

Only one of the five is directly related to a cartoon by Nast. In two others, individual figures and images are related to those in his published works. Otherwise, these paintings are original creations. As compositions they are more complete than his cartoons up to that time. The latter had often been composites of several small scenes, rather than the simplified, concentrated single images that gave his later cartoons their impact. The big paintings, while rich in details, are unified designs. They show a compositional sense new in his work, a feeling for the total pictorial space. Nast's unerring grasp of character, his rich caricatural gift, and his strong draftsman-



ship are visible throughout, but the handling is much freer than in his cartoons of the time, or his easel paintings. This grandiose project evidently inspired him to let himself go as he never had before. And what is most unexpected for a black-and-white artist, the paintings reveal a fresh, lively color sense—far more than his easel paintings. All these qualities make one wish that the Caricaturama had been a financial success, and that Nast had painted more such pictures. These five paintings rouse the hope that some day more of the original thirty-three may come to light.

1. COLUMBIA AND JONATHAN AT HOME

7'10¼" x 11'6". Signed lower right: "Th. Nast." (Number 4, Catalogue of Th. Nast's Grand Caricaturama, page 6)

In explanation of the symbolism in this scene, a newspaper review of the Boston exhibition said that Columbia, after landing on Plymouth Rock and being greeted by the genius of Liberty, "soon becomes acquainted with Jonathan, marries him, and they set up housekeeping. She is shocked to find he has slaves, and the picture which represents them at home is very funny. She is looking sorrowfully at a crowd of the most comical little darkies, while Jonathan, with hands thrust in his pockets, and evidently whistling to himself, is gazing at the statues with which some 'prophetic artist' has decorated his hall."

The over-lifesize statues include some of Nast's pet hates, including two fellow journalists. The press in these violently partisan days carried on intra-professional vendettas that would have brought libel actions today: Democratic and Republican papers exchanged insults, editors pilloried their opposites numbers, even caricaturists caricatured each other. To Nast anything Democratic was "Copperhead," and called for the corresponding symbol.

From left to right: Manton Marble, editor of *The World* (who later prostituted his paper to the Tweed Ring) as Atlas bowed beneath the globe, which is encircled by a copperhead. Next toward the right, as "Gladiator," the Honorable John Morrissey, ex-pugilist, immigrant runner, barroom and gambling-house proprietor, a power in Tammany Hall, elected to Congress the preceding year, later a state senator. Then An-

drew Johnson as Moses holding a tablet inscribed "Veto." (Among his injudicious public statements, Johnson had told the Negroes, "I am your Moses.") In the background, as the Devil, Fernando Wood, adroit and corrupt Mayor of New York (1854 to 1861), pro-slavery if it suited his purposes; when the Southern states were about to secede from the Union, he had officially suggested that New York City secede with them. Nast had published an identical caricature of him in *Harper's Weekly*. Finally, at the right, James Gordon Bennett, Sr., founder and editor of the *New York Herald*, brilliant and cynical journalist, as Apollo with a lyre—undoubtedly a pun.

It is noteworthy that the Negroes are the liveliest element in the painting, contrasting with the cold marmoreal statues—or for that matter, with Columbia and Jonathan. Certainly there is mockery in the father's low bow and the children's antics in front of the statues.

2. THE KANSAS ROW

7'10½" x 11'7½". Signed lower right: "Th. Nast." (Number 5, Catalogue of Th. Nast's Grand Caricaturama, page 6)

One of the most bitter pre-war conflicts between North and South was over the new territory of Kansas—whether it should be free-soil, or permitting slavery like its neighboring state Missouri. In 1854 Stephen A. Douglas, the "Little Giant" from Illinois, Lincoln's future antagonist, fathered the Kansas-Nebraska bill, which left the question to the people of the territory. The bill enraged Northern free-soil advocates, who thereupon financed large-scale immigration into the territory. This was matched by an influx of Southern slave-

holders, and of "border ruffians" from Missouri. Both sides were armed, and guerrilla warfare resulted.

Another continuing source of outrage throughout the North was the Fugitive Slave Act, by which Negroes who had escaped to the North could be arrested and returned to slavery—a law as unenforceable as Prohibition was to be in our century.

In "The Kansas Row" the swamp with its big frog suggests the usual route for escaping slaves. A contemporary Boston newspaper explained the theme: "Puritan and Cavalier are represented, the latter kicking Negroes over a fence, into Kansas, and the former rolling up his sleeves for a fight." But the Puritan side of the fence would be Kansas and not Missouri; and the Cavalier, whose features strongly resemble Douglas', is probably kicking the Negroes back into Missouri.

Aside from the figures, the painting reveals a gift for landscape quite unexpected in Nast. The range and variety of color, and the play of light, with the dark shaded foreground and somber swamp contrasting with the sunlit field and hillside and the blue sky, show that he could create design in light and color as well as in the black lines of the woodblock.

3. KING COTTON

7'10½" x 11'6". Signed lower right: "Th. Nast." (Number 9, Catalogue of Th. Nast's Grand Caricaturama, page 6)

A skinny old king with hair and beard of cotton, a huge oversize crown on his head, a whip in his hand, sits on his throne, while Negro slaves bring him cool drinks, and female slaves fan him. Britannia and Napoleon III prostrate themselves before him and deposit their crowns at his feet—a re-

minder that during the Civil War the governments and manufacturing interests of some European states, dependent on Southern cotton, had sided with the Confederacy. The base of the dais is inscribed "Slavery." In the elaborate ornamentation around the throne the repeated "C. S. A." is of course "Confederate States of America." The S's and C's are copperheads. The crocodiles in the proscenium arch refer to the National Union Convention of 1866, an attempt to unite conservatives of both parties, North and South, behind the President's policies. At the opening, Governor Orr of South Carolina and General Couch of Massachusetts had entered arm-in-arm, symbolizing the reconciliation of the two old enemies, while the band played "The Star-spangled Banner" and "Dixie," and everybody wept. Nast in a cartoon, "The Tearful Convention," had ridiculed this by a crocodile and a copperhead arm-in-arm, both weeping; and thereafter the two reptiles played a leading part in his cartoons.

The throne-room is crowded with militant leaders of the Confederacy, shown as knights in armor, heavily burlesqued. Their armor is a fantasy of grotesque shapes, with sharp aggressive points projecting all over, long plumes, and helmets like the heads of geese, serpents and pigs. Their weapons are ludicrously large and cumbersome. The tall figure at the left, crowned with horns and sitting on a shield with the emblem of a circle, probably represents the recently spawned Ku Klux Klan, whose name was said to be based on the Greek word for circle, *kyklos*. To terrify Negroes, Klan members often donned disguises to increase their height, with fancy features such as horns. It is perhaps significant that the faces of most of the knights are concealed by their helmets.

The whole pictorial concept is theatrical: the strutting figures with their bogus arms and armor, posing as if before footlights; the stage and its charade; the baroque architecture and decoration—all reflect Nast's love of the theater, and his effective use of theatrical devices to ridicule his enemies.

4. THE UPRISING OF THE NORTH

7'10½" x 11'7". (Number 11, Catalogue of Th. Nast's Grand Caricaturama, page 6)

A night scene. Columbia stands on a balcony draped with the United States flag, with the American Eagle beside her, wings outspread. She brandishes her sword, and below her, mounted knights salute her with drawn swords. In the distance is a wide landscape of mountains, valleys, rivers and lakes—a whole continent—with beacon fires everywhere. In the sky is a vision of the national Capitol, with rays of light radiating from it like the aurora borealis.

This is a vision at the opposite extreme from the burlesque court and knights of "King Cotton"—opposite in emotion, in setting, and even in such details as the armor and weapons. The painting reveals Nast's complete belief in the righteousness of the Northern cause. It also reveals the basic romanticism that governed his politics and art. The content, imagery and style have an echt deutsch Gothicism that recalls his German ancestry and birth. The landscape, with its spectacular natural features and its sense of wide space, is close to the grandiosity of his contemporaries, the Hudson River School painters.

5. THE MASSACRE AT NEW ORLEANS

7'10¼" x 11'6½". Signed lower right: "Th. Nast." (Number 24, Catalogue of Th. Nast's Grand Caricaturama, page 6)

This is the only one of the five paintings that is related to a specific event and a specific cartoon. In July 1866 a bloody race riot had occurred in New Orleans. It originated in a conflict between the Democratic state government, established in accordance with Lincoln's and Johnson's procedures, and the Radical Republicans, who hoped to capture control of the state by reconvening the "loyalist" convention of 1864—a measure legally unjustified, even revolutionary. Johnson opposed the convention, but did nothing to prevent it. When the convention met in New Orleans, the Negro delegates came into collision with the police and a white mob; the police entered the convention hall and shot indiscriminately into the gathering. Those attempting to escape were shot, the wounded were beaten. Thirty-seven Negroes and three white sympathizers were killed, and over a hundred wounded, most of them Negroes. There were only a few wounded and one dead among the police and the white mob. It had been a police riot, with mob support. The question of ultimate responsibility was complex, going to the heart of the Reconstruction problem; but the brutalities were evident enough, and the fact that almost all the killed and wounded were Negroes.

This tragic affair aroused outrage in the North. The Radicals pinned the responsibility directly on Johnson. Charles Sumner, Radical leader in the Senate, said of this and a similar riot in Memphis: "Who can doubt that the President is the author of these tragedies? Charles IX of France was

not more completely the author of the massacre of St. Bartholomew than Andrew Johnson is the author of these recent massacres."

The New Orleans riot had been the occasion of Nast's first direct cartoon attack on Johnson, "Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction and How It Works" (Page number 5). In the painting he used much of the same material, but eliminated the minor scenes and concentrated on the image of Johnson hiding inside a building, listening through the half-open door to the riot in progress between whites carrying a Confederate flag and helpless Negroes with the United States flag. In both cartoon and painting appears the same wall, inscribed with Johnson's contradictory statements, including those addressed to Negroes, "I am your Moses" and "The time will come when it will be proved who is your best friend." (Most of the rioters' figures are repeated from the cartoon, but reversed, since in those days illustrators drew on the woodblock in reverse.) Not only in its subject and viewpoint, but in its style and pictorial quality, the painting strangely anticipates the social content school of the 1930's; the wall with its inscriptions might have been painted by Ben Shahn.

Johnson is shown as a king, crowned and in velvet and ermine. His alleged royalist ambition had been the theme of much Radical rhetoric; as early as 1865 Thaddeus Stevens, fanatical leader of the Radicals in the House, had written Sumner: "If something is not done the President will be crowned King before Congress meets." In November 1866 Nast had published a cartoon showing King Andy I on his throne, watching a long line of enemies being led to the block —Nast himself taking his place at the end of the line.

COLUMBIA AND JONATHAN AT HOME

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THE KANSAS ROW



KING COTTON



THE UPRISING OF THE NORTH



THE MASSACRE AT NEW ORLEANS



"TREASON IS A CRIME"
"TRAITORS MUST
BE PUNISHED"
"I AM THE MURDERER"

"THE TIME
WILL COME
WHEN
WHO IS
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